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Advocacy strategy on the effective and timely implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The advocacy strategy on the effective and timely implementation of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010, contained in the present report, has been prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 61/211. The advocacy strategy defines the approaches that shall be used to raise awareness about the objectives, goals and commitments of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for its effective and timely implementation. It will guide the advocacy work of the United Nations with a broad range of stakeholders, including Member States; other international and regional organizations; international and regional financial institutions; non-governmental organizations; the private sector; foundations; academia; the media; and the general public.

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I. Introduction

1. The overarching objective of the Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010 is to make substantial progress towards halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty and suffering from hunger by 2015 and promote the sustainable development of the least developed countries.[1] The Programme of Action provides a framework for a global partnership to accelerate sustained economic growth and sustainable development in the least developed countries to end marginalization by eradicating poverty, inequality and deprivation in these countries and to enable them to integrate beneficially into the global economy.

2. In the course of the implementation of the Programme of Action by the least developed countries and their development partners, tangible results have been achieved, including higher rates of economic growth and improvements in some quantitative measures of human development for least developed countries as a group. However, the impact of these achievements on poverty levels and the quality of life has been marginal for the great majority of the least developed countries.[2] Moreover, stakeholders' efforts to deliver on their commitments under the Programme of Action continue, for the most part, to fall short of what is needed to achieve its objectives. As the General Assembly acknowledged in its midterm review of the implementation of the Programme of Action undertaken in 2006, much remains to be done, particularly in the area of poverty eradication.[3] With only three years left to the end of the Programme, there is an urgent need to significantly accelerate its implementation, especially in those areas that were highlighted through the midterm review process as deserving greater attention.

3. Against this backdrop, in paragraph 18 of its resolution 61/211, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to elaborate and submit to the General Assembly at its sixty-second session a detailed and clearly defined advocacy strategy aimed at raising awareness about the objectives, goals and commitments of the Programme of Action with a view to facilitating its effective and timely implementation.[4] The advocacy strategy implemented by the United Nations will seek to galvanize actions by all stakeholders for the accelerated implementation of the Programme of Action. This will be achieved by drawing sustained attention at the national, regional and international levels to the shortfalls, challenges and opportunities in the implementation of the Programme.

4. The advocacy strategy takes due account of the ongoing advocacy work undertaken by the United Nations, especially through the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States in accordance with its mandate under General Assembly resolution 56/227. Such work includes:

(a) Establishing an advocacy unit within the Office to provide support to advocacy efforts;

[1] A/CONF.191/11, chap. II, para. 6.
[2] See A/61/173.
[3] Resolution 61/1, para. 9.
[4] Resolution 61/211, para. 18.

(b) Engaging with other United Nations entities to mainstream the Programme of Action in their programmes and activities;

(c) Drawing attention to issues of interest to least developed countries in national and international forums;

(d) Establishing and maintaining a website on least developed country issues;

(e) Commissioning studies on selected issues pertaining to least developed countries;

(f) Organizing conferences, discussions and other forums to discuss issues of interest to least developed countries;

(g) Encouraging media coverage of the development challenges and opportunities for least developed countries;

(h) Issuing press statements, feature releases, interviews and analytical articles;

(i) Building partnerships with other United Nations entities, multilateral institutions, civil society and the private sector for collaborative activities in support of least developed countries.

5. These advocacy efforts, undertaken in cooperation with other relevant parts of the United Nations system, have contributed to specific actions in the implementation of the Programme of Action by the least developed countries and their development partners, including decisions by 19 United Nations system and other multilateral organizations to mainstream the Programme of Action; a significant increase in expenditures of the United Nations system on operational activities for development in the least developed countries; the designation of focal points by least developed countries, United Nations system organizations and other multilateral entities; initiation of programmes by United Nations system organizations and other partners in support of least developed countries; analyses of the development challenges of least developed countries by United Nations system organizations within their respective mandates; and greater attention to the special needs of least developed countries in intergovernmental processes. The advocacy strategy outlined below seeks to build upon, expand and intensify these efforts.

II. The advocacy strategy

6. The United Nations, in collaboration with other relevant stakeholders, will undertake intensive, focused and sustained advocacy to raise awareness about the Brussels Programme of Action, with a view to accelerating its full and effective implementation by all partners. The advocacy efforts in the remaining three years of the Programme of Action will seek to advance its implementation by focusing on areas of the Programme of Action where progress has been particularly lacking or limited, as highlighted during the midterm review of the implementation of the Programme of Action undertaken in 2006.

A. Advocacy objectives

7. In accordance with General Assembly resolution 61/211, the overarching objective of advocacy actions will be increased awareness about the objectives, goals and commitments of the Programme of Action, with a view to facilitating its effective and timely implementation by all stakeholders. To that end, advocacy actions will pursue the following strategic objectives:

(a) Increased awareness about the shortfalls, challenges and opportunities in the implementation of the Programme of Action among all stakeholders;

(b) Broader and stronger actions and partnerships at the national, regional and international levels in support of the implementation of the Programme of Action;

(c) Further actions by the United Nations system at the national, regional and international levels in the implementation of the Programme of Action.

B. Target audiences

8. Advocacy actions will be aimed at the following stakeholders who have been identified by the Programme of Action and General Assembly resolution 56/227 as having a role to play in the implementation of the Programme of Action:

(a) Least developed country Governments;

(b) Governments of donor countries;

(c) Governments of developing countries;

(d) United Nations system organizations;

(e) Bretton Woods institutions, regional financial institutions and other international organizations;

(f) Regional and subregional intergovernmental organizations;

(g) Media;

(h) Civil society, including non-governmental organizations;

(i) The private sector;

(j) Foundations;

(k) Academia.

The advocacy objectives, tools and messages will be tailored to the roles of the respective stakeholders in the implementation of the Programme of Action.

C. Areas of focus

9. Advocacy actions will focus on the overall implementation of the Programme of Action with particular attention to those areas where progress is lacking, as highlighted by the midterm review, and the reports of the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Programme of Action. Based on the declaration of the high-level meeting on the midterm review of the implementation of the Programme of

Action;[5] the Secretary-General's report on the implementation of the Programme of Action in its first five years;[6] and the Secretary-General's annual report on the implementation of the Programme of Action of 2007,[7] advocacy efforts will focus on the following areas.

1. Advancing the implementation of the Programme of Action as a whole

10. Progress achieved in the implementation of the Programme of Action so far provides a major opportunity to provide further impetus to its full and timely realization. The least developed countries have made major efforts to strengthen their development policy framework and governance, with a sharper focus on poverty eradication. Development partners have made efforts in the areas of development assistance, debt relief and market access opportunities for least developed countries. These efforts have contributed to improved economic performance by least developed countries, with annual economic growth averaging 6.5 per cent between 2001 and 2005.[8] However, serious challenges remain. Many least developed countries are still short of the Programme of Action target of 7 per cent annual economic growth, and improved economic performance has impacted marginally on poverty levels and the quality of life in many cases. Nevertheless, the achievements so far demonstrate that with determined action by all parties to deliver on their commitments, the objectives and targets of the Programme of Action can be met. Thus the high-level meeting of the sixty-first session of the General Assembly on the midterm review of the implementation of the Programme of Action declared that internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, can be effectively achieved in the least developed countries through, in particular, the timely fulfilment of the seven commitments of the Programme of Action.[9]

11. Advocacy actions to advance the implementation of the Programme of Action as a whole will tap into the results attained so far and the momentum generated by the midterm review, including the renewal by all parties of their commitments under the Programme Action. In particular, the United Nations will pursue the following advocacy actions:

(a) Continue to raise general awareness about the Programme of Action through the advocacy efforts of the Secretary-General and other senior United Nations officials and developing and disseminating information and communication materials about its objectives, goals and commitments. Such materials will include brochures, fact sheets, posters, newsletters and statistical information;

(b) Conduct regular briefing meetings for Member States, international organizations, civil society organizations, the media, the private sector and other stakeholders to sensitize and update them on the implementation of the Programme of Action;

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[5] Resolution 61/1.
[6] A/61/173.
[7] A/62/79-E/2007/63.
[8] A/61/173, para. 6.
[9] Resolution 61/1, para. 5.

(c) Integrate the Programme of Action into the public outreach activities of the United Nations system, including outreach to civil society, the private sector, academia and the general public;

(d) Prepare and disseminate information on best practices and success stories in the implementation of the Programme of Action to encourage more and broader actions in its implementation.

2. Financial resources for development

12. The midterm review of the implementation of the Programme of Action highlighted the lack of necessary financial resources as one of the greatest constraints to the implementation of the Programme of Action by least developed countries. Except for oil-exporting countries within this group, there has been no significant improvement in domestically generated revenues of least developed countries. External support, especially in the form of official development assistance (ODA) and debt cancellation, remains essential to the implementation of the Programme of Action.

13. Between 2001, when the Programme of Action was adopted, and 2005, ODA to least developed countries increased by about 75 per cent. However, despite recent pledges, most donors are falling behind the target of 0.20 per cent of their gross national income in official development assistance to least developed countries. In 2005, only 6 out of 22 donors met the 0.20 per cent target, down from 7 in 2004.[10] Moreover, the share of aid to least developed countries in total official development assistance has dropped.[11] Preliminary figures for 2006 released by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development indicated a decline in overall ODA, a change that would be a major cause for concern if it were confirmed. Moreover, the definition of ODA appears to be diluted by inclusion of other items such as debt relief. On the other hand, important steps, such as the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, have been taken to improve the quality of aid. Progress towards the cancellation of the external debt of least developed countries, particularly the implementation of the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative, needs to be accelerated. More action is also needed to cancel the bilateral debt owed by the least developed countries. At the same time, least developed countries should strengthen their efficiency in the utilization of available resources for poverty reduction.

14. The following advocacy actions will be undertaken in support of efforts to mobilize resources for the implementation of the Programme of Action:

(a) Generate and disseminate information on the progress of development partners towards meeting their ODA targets, as well as the progress of least developed countries in mobilizing domestic resources for poverty reduction;

(b) In collaboration with civil society organizations, campaign for increased official development assistance on improved terms;

(c) Promote non-traditional sources of development financing to complement official development assistance;

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[10] The 6 of a total of 22 member countries of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development that met the 0.20 target were Denmark, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden.

[11] See A/62/79-E/2007/63, para. 63; and A/61/173, para. 22.

(d) Promote improved expenditure, budgetary and accountability frameworks for enhanced efficiency, transparency and accountability in the absorption and utilization of increased external and domestic resources for development;

(e) Campaign for the cancellation of bilateral debt owed by least developed countries.

3. Trade

15. The Programme of Action recognizes trade as an increasingly important source of resources for financing growth and development and calls for duty-free and quota-free market access for all products of least developed countries. Progress has been made towards duty-free and quota-free market access for the products of least developed countries, but due to both demand-side and supply-side constraints, the share of least developed countries in world exports has increased only marginally since the adoption of the Programme of Action, and remains well below 1 per cent.[12] At the World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference in December 2005, developed countries agreed to eliminate duties and quotas on imports from the least developed countries accounted for by 97 per cent of the tariff lines of each developed country. Since most least developed countries export a small number of products, a major limitation of this agreement is that the 3 per cent of tariff lines that are excluded could cover a large proportion of each least developed country's exports, thereby eroding any potential benefits. Moreover, the agreement falls short of the commitment of the developed countries under the Programme of Action to provide full market access to all products from all least developed countries. Lack of progress on the development aspects of the Doha round of multilateral trade negotiations remains a key concern. In addition, non-tariff barriers remain a major obstacle to least developed countries' trading opportunities.

16. In view of the above, the United Nations will undertake the following advocacy actions concerning trade:

(a) Continue to campaign for full and effective access for all products from all least developed countries to the markets of developed countries; elimination of trade-distorting subsidies and non-tariff barriers that negatively affect least developed countries' actual or potential exports;

(b) Advocate greater support for strengthening trade-related capacities in least developed countries, and for increased trade-related technical assistance to them, including within the framework of Integrated Framework and Aid for Trade;

(c) Generate and disseminate up-to-date information on trade constraints and opportunities for least developed countries;

(d) Facilitate interactions among least developed countries, development partners, civil society and the private sectors on trade-related challenges and opportunities for least developed countries;

(e) Promote further use of South-South trade for the benefit of least developed countries, and campaign for the sharing of best practices among least developed countries and with other developing countries on trade.

[12] See A/62/79, para. 50.

4. Infrastructure

17. Least developed countries are still far from reaching the Programme of Action target of increasing road networks and connections to the level of other developing countries. While cellular technology has enabled least developed countries to increase average telephone density to 3.2 lines per 100 inhabitants compared to the target of 5 lines per 100 inhabitants, Internet usage, at less than 1 per cent of the population, remains well below the target of 10 per cent.[13] Many least developed countries are experiencing severe energy shortages, which is not only a hindrance to economic growth, but poses health and environmental challenges.

18. In the social sectors, the quantity and quality of schools, medical centres and similar facilities remain inadequate in most least developed countries, particularly in rural areas. Efforts to improve access to water and sanitation have concentrated on urban areas, with only 28 least developed countries on track to achieve the target for provision of clean water in rural areas.[14] There remains an acute need for investment to increase education and health facilities, to provide safe water to rural areas and to improve sanitation throughout the least developed countries.

19. The following advocacy actions will be undertaken to raise awareness about the infrastructure needs of least developed countries:

(a) Generate and disseminate information on the infrastructure needs and challenges of least developed countries;

(b) Promote private sector investment in the development, maintenance and management of infrastructure in least developed countries;

(c) Campaign for increased financial and technical assistance by developed countries and multilateral organizations towards development, maintenance and management of infrastructure in least developed countries;

(d) Promote South-South cooperation for the development of infrastructure in least developed countries.

5. Health, HIV/AIDS and other diseases

20. At 51 years, life expectancy in the least developed countries remains the lowest in the world. Worse still, it is declining in a number of African least developed countries. Extreme poverty, poor nutrition, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and other preventable diseases, exacerbated by inadequate health and social services, are the main contributing factors. Only five least developed countries are close to achieving the target of reducing maternal mortality by three quarters by 2015. Similarly, many least developed countries have not made any significant progress towards the targets of the Programme of Action to reduce infant and child mortality. There is a decline in new infections of HIV/AIDS in the majority of least developed countries, but about one quarter of those infected live in these countries, one of the main reasons for the high incidence of tuberculosis. Malaria remains a major concern, with half the 30 least developed countries for which data is available experiencing an increase in both the incidence of malaria and malaria deaths.[15] Not

[13] A/61/173, table 2.
[14] A/62/79-E/2007/63, para. 34.
[15] A/62/79-E/2007/63, paras. 28-40.

only do these health challenges inflict human suffering, but they also severely undermine development efforts in the least developed countries.

21. The advocacy actions to encourage greater efforts to address the health challenges of least developed countries will be coordinated with ongoing initiatives and campaigns, and will focus on:

(a) Generating and disseminating information and analyses on the health challenges of least developed countries and their implications for sustainable development;

(b) Campaigning for greater ODA and capacity-building towards the health sectors in the least developed countries;

(c) Highlighting the health challenges of the least developed countries through other relevant advocacy initiatives of the United Nations, including the United Nations Millennium Campaign.

6. Employment

22. According to the *Least Developed Countries Report 2006* prepared by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the labour force in the least developed countries grew by 71 million between 1990 and 2000 and is expected to grow by another 89 million, to reach to a total of 401 million by 2010. The decade 2000-2010 is also one of transition for most least developed countries, with the growth of the labour force outside agriculture outstripping the growth of the labour force within agriculture.[16]

23. The challenge of providing productive employment is exacerbated by the population structure of the least developed countries. With a median age of 19 years, the least developed countries have the youngest population in the world. The resulting high dependency ratio could increase extreme poverty, but it could also provide a demographic window of opportunity if a large proportion of young people is able to find productive employment, thereby increasing the number of effective producers per effective consumer.[17]

24. In the light of the above, the United Nations will undertake the following advocacy actions:

(a) Generate and disseminate information on the employment challenges and opportunities for least developed countries;

(b) Campaign for increased access to financial services, including microfinance, as a means to generate employment, especially in the rural areas;

(c) Raise awareness about private sector investment opportunities in the least developed countries;

(d) Campaign for increased investment in the development of human capital through health, education and training.

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[16] See *Least Developed Countries Report 2006*, United Nations publication, Sales No. E.06.II.D.9.

[17] A/62/79-E/2007/63, paras. 25-27.

7. Environmental vulnerability

25. Least developed countries are acutely vulnerable to the natural shocks and the adverse effects of climate change. They lack the financial and technical means to respond to the challenges posed by land degradation, drought, desertification, deforestation, water and air pollution, and climate change. Given the heavy dependence of least developed countries on agriculture, which is very sensitive to environmental conditions, these environmental challenges pose a major threat to efforts to reduce hunger, malnutrition and poverty.

26. Climate change has emerged as a major concern of the international community. Preparations are expected for negotiations for a new international regime to succeed the current commitments under the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Convention on Climate Change,[18] which will expire in 2012. It is important that the growing international concern on climate change pay sufficient attention to the special needs of least developed countries which, because of their vulnerabilities, suffer the most from its adverse impact.

27. The United Nations will undertake the following advocacy actions on the environmental vulnerability of least developed countries:

(a) Campaign for greater efforts by least developed countries to address the challenges of climate change, including the preparation of National Adaptation Programmes of Action;

(b) Raise awareness about the adverse impact of climate change on least developed countries so that international efforts to address the challenge of global change pay sufficient attention to the needs of least developed countries;

(c) Facilitate the preparations of least developed countries for negotiations on the post-2012 global regime on climate change;

(d) Facilitate sharing of best practices among least developed countries and with other developing countries on environmental protection and management practices.

D. Advocacy: means and tools

28. The United Nations will use a range of advocacy means, tools and techniques to raise awareness and create impetus for action in the implementation of the Programme of Action, especially in the areas that have been highlighted. In particular, the following means and tools will be used:

1. United Nations system facilities and resources

29. The information, communication and advocacy infrastructure and mechanisms of the United Nations system will be fully utilized to advocate for the implementation of the Programme of Action, including:

(a) Meetings, statements, speeches and media appearances of the Secretary-General, the Deputy Secretary-General, the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island

[18] FCCC/CP/1997/7/Add.1, decision 1/CP.3, annex.

Developing States, and other senior United Nations officials to call for tangible action by various stakeholders to fulfil their commitments under the Programme of Action;

(b) Facilities, information and communication tools of the Department of Public Information, including the News Centre, United Nations Radio and television, Internet services, United Nations information centres, publications and magazines to raise awareness about the priorities of the Programme of Action;

(c) Encouraging United Nations system entities that devote a substantial part of their work to least developed countries to integrate into their communication, information and advocacy activities the priorities of the Programme of Action that fall within their respective mandates;

(d) Encouraging United Nations resident coordinators and country teams to promote the implementation of the Programme of Action through policy consultation and development processes that exist at the country level;

(e) Using the analytical capacity of United Nations system entities to highlight gaps and opportunities in the implementation of the Programme of Action;

(f) Collaborating with ongoing advocacy campaigns of the United Nations, particularly the Millennium Campaign, to integrate into their activities the priorities for the implementation of the Programme of Action;

(g) Using United Nations system field presence, particularly the United Nations regional commissions and the United Nations country teams, to promote the priorities of the Programme of Action at the regional and national levels, respectively.

2. Outreach to civil society, foundations and academia

30. The United Nations will seek partnerships with civil society organizations, foundations and academia to advance the implementation of the Programme of Action. Civil society organizations have a wide reach at the global, regional and national levels that can play a major role in drawing attention to gaps, challenges and opportunities in the implementation of the Programme of Action. A number of civil society organizations and foundations are engaged in focused campaigns on issues relevant to the implementation of the Programme of Action, such as debt cancellation and fair trade. The United Nations will seek collaboration with such organizations to have the relevant issues of the Programme integrated in their advocacy activities. Outreach to academia, including universities and research institutions, will aim at generating up-to-date information that can facilitate policy discussions and recommendations as well as further advocacy for the implementation of the Programme of Action.

31. The following activities will be undertaken in relation to civil society, foundations and academia:

(a) Identify and facilitate eminent persons or institutions in academia, civil society organizations and other fields to promote the cause of least developed countries and the implementation of the Programme of Action;

(b) Conduct joint activities, including publications, conferences and other forums on the priority areas for the implementation of the Programme of Action;

(c) Regular briefings to civil society organizations on the needs, constraints and opportunities for the implementation of the Programme of Action;

(d) Collaborate with coalitions of civil society organizations and foundations engaged in global advocacy of relevance to the Programme of Action to highlight in their campaigns the special needs of least developed countries.

3. Media outreach

32. The United Nations will expand and intensify its media outreach activities at both the global and national levels in order to raise public awareness about the priorities for the implementation of the Programme of Action. The following activities will be undertaken in this regard:

(a) Promote coverage of least developed country issues in the mass media, including newspapers, radio, television, online media and magazines, through targeted press and feature releases;

(b) Utilize media appearances of the Secretary-General, the Deputy Secretary-General, the High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, and other senior United Nations officials to highlight the priorities for effective implementation of the Programme of Action;

(c) Create media opportunities for Member States, civil society organizations and other partners to speak on the challenges and opportunities for the implementation of the Programme of Action;

(d) Utilize the annual training programme for young journalists organized by the Department of Public Information to increase media awareness of least developed country issues and the Programme of Action.

E. Implementation and coordination

33. The Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States will lead and coordinate the implementation of the advocacy strategy in accordance with its mandate to:

(a) Undertake appropriate advocacy work in favour of the least developed countries;

(b) Assist the Secretary-General in ensuring the full mobilization and coordination of all parts of the United Nations system for coordinated implementation and follow-up of the Programme of Action at the country, regional and global levels;

(c) Assist in mobilizing international support and resources for the implementation of the Programme of Action.

34. In the implementation of the advocacy strategy, the Office will work in close partnership with relevant parts of the United Nations system, including the Department of Public Information and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, the regional commissions, the funds and programmes, the United Nations Non-Government Liaison Service and United

Nations resident coordinators. The Office will also collaborate with appropriate civil society organizations in the implementation of the strategy.

F. Duration

35. The advocacy actions set out in this advocacy strategy will be implemented until the end of the Programme of Action.

G. Funding

36. Advocacy actions undertaken under this advocacy strategy will be funded in the following ways:

(a) Within the existing resources of the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States and the United Nations departments, organizations, funds, programmes and other entities participating in the implementation of the strategy;

(b) By mobilizing extrabudgetary resources, including funds raised from external sources by the Office and its implementing partners for the purposes of carrying out specific advocacy actions.

H. Monitoring

37. As the implementation of the advocacy strategy will be a major undertaking of the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States, it will be integrated into, and monitored as part of, the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States programme of work. The tools used to monitor the programme performance of the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States will be applied to the advocacy strategy, including the Integrated Monitoring and Document Information System and the Integrated Management Information System. Based on the results of the monitoring exercises, the implementation of the advocacy strategy will be adjusted where necessary to ensure maximum impact.